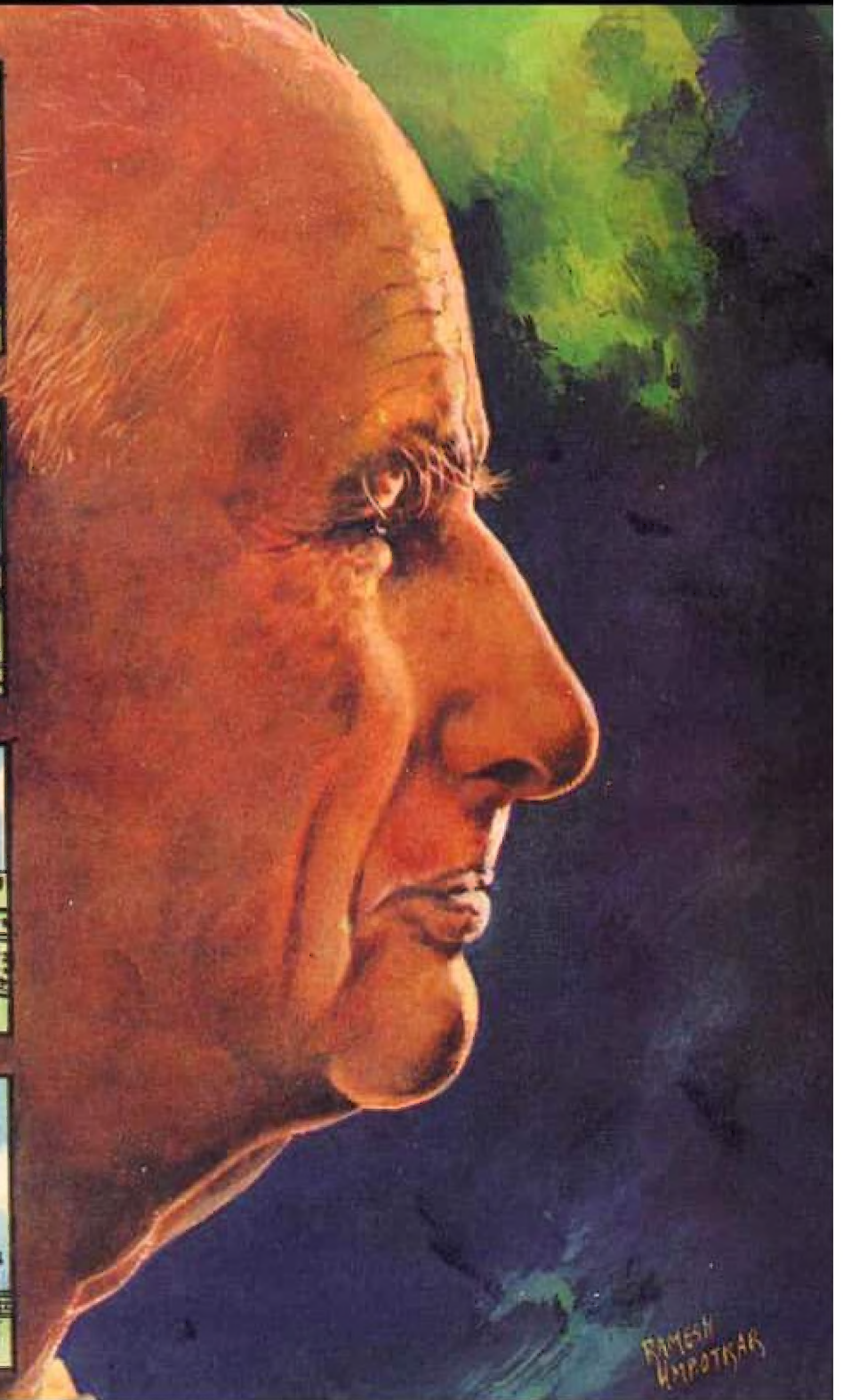




# GHANSHYAMDAS BIRLA

A BUILDER OF MODERN INDIA

Vol 733



RAMESH  
KUMAR



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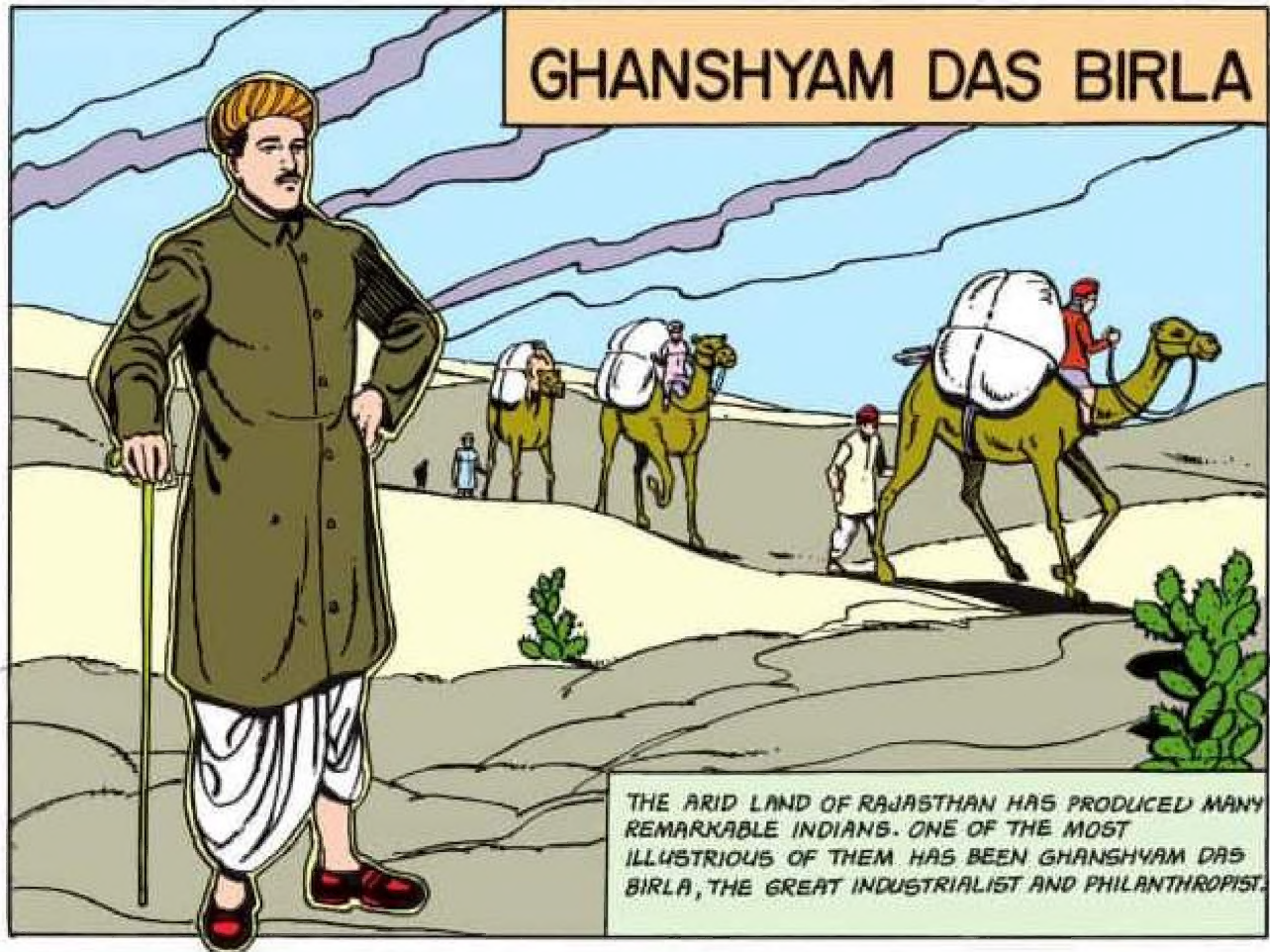
Editor  
**Anant Pai**

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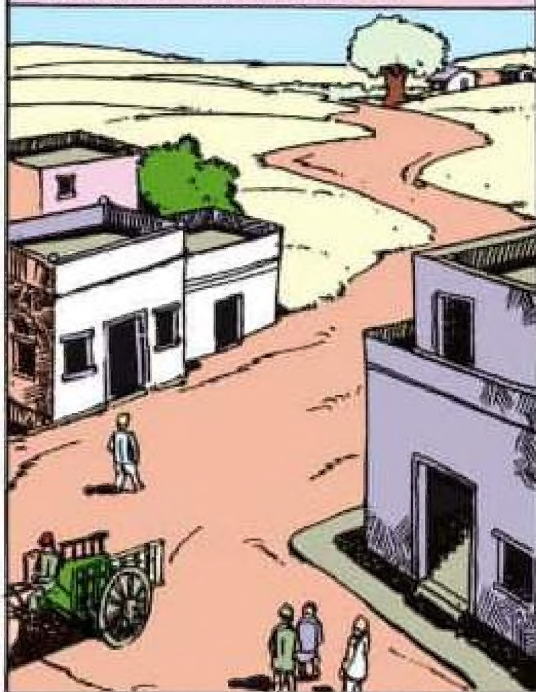


# GHANSHYAM DAS BIRLA



THE ARID LAND OF RAJASTHAN HAS PRODUCED MANY REMARKABLE INDIANS. ONE OF THE MOST ILLUSTRIOUS OF THEM HAS BEEN GHANSHYAM DAS BIRLA, THE GREAT INDUSTRIALIST AND PHILANTHROPIST.

GHANSHYAM DAS BIRLA HAILED FROM PILANI, WHICH TODAY IS A MODERN CITY. BUT AT THE TIME OF HIS BIRTH IN 1894 IT WAS A SMALL, SLEEPY, VILLAGE SURROUNDED BY SAND-DUNES.



GHANSHYAM'S GREAT-GRANDFATHER WAS A MUNIM\* EARNING SEVEN RUPEES A MONTH — A FAIR WAGE IN THOSE DAYS.



\* ACCOUNTANT



THE STORY OF THE BIRLA FAMILY'S ENTERPRISE BEGAN WITH GHANSHYAM'S GRANDFATHER SHIVNARAIN. SHIVNARAIN TOOK A BOLD STEP WHEN HIS FATHER DIED.

SHIVNARAIN, YOUR FATHER SERVED US WELL. I AM SURE YOU TOO WILL. WHY DON'T YOU TAKE HIS PLACE IN OUR GADDI\*?

I AM GRATEFUL TO YOU, SETHJI, FOR REPOSING YOUR FAITH IN ME...



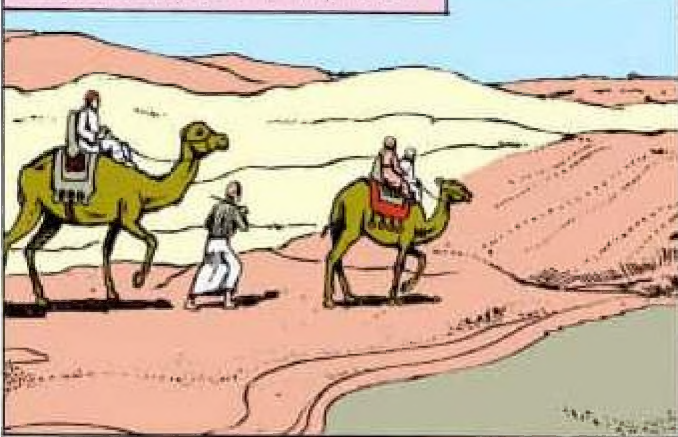
...BUT I HAVE DECIDED TO PURSUE THE VAISHYA DHARMA\*.



ON AN AUSPICIOUS DAY, IN 1860, SHIVNARAIN LEFT PILANI FOR DISAVARI.\*\*



THE NEAREST RAILWAY STATION FROM PILANI FOR BOMBAY, WAS AHMEDABAD. THE JOURNEY TO AHMEDABAD HAD TO BE MADE ON CAMEL-BACK.



THE TRAIN JOURNEY TO BOMBAY WAS ALSO NOT COMFORTABLE.



IT WAS FULL OF JERKS.

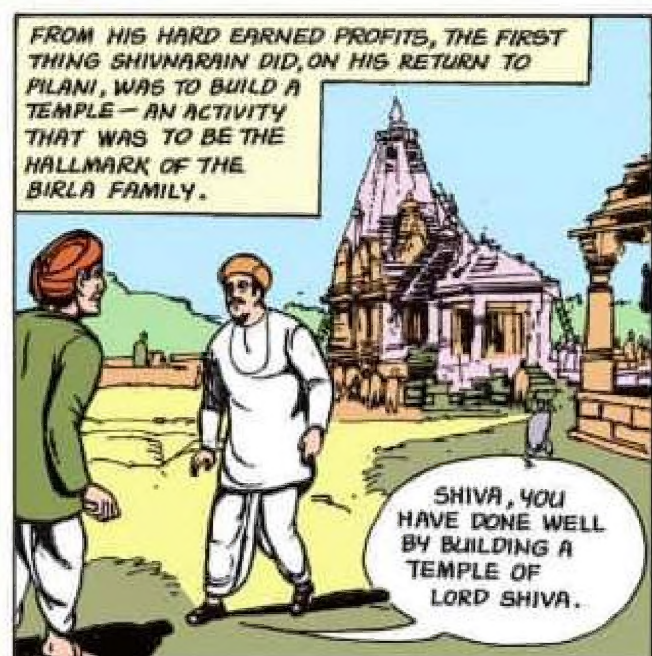
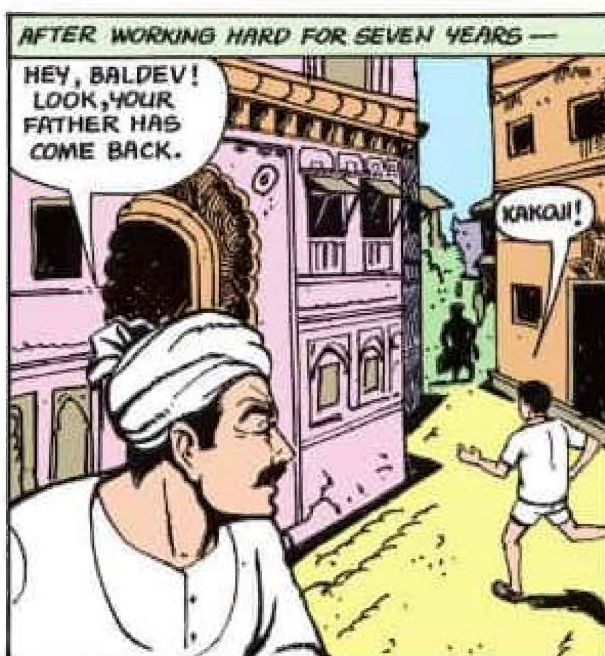
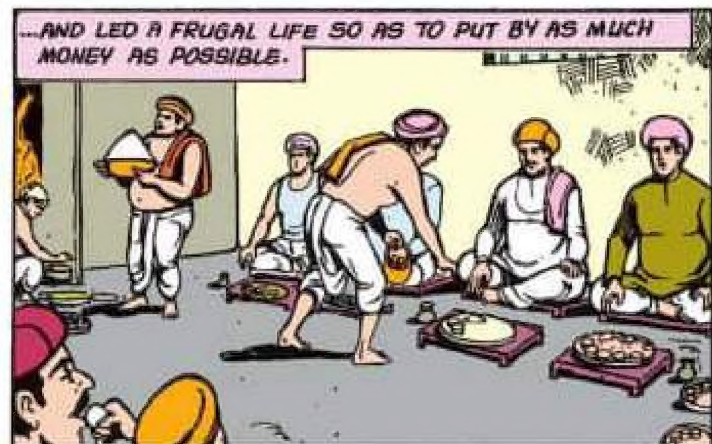
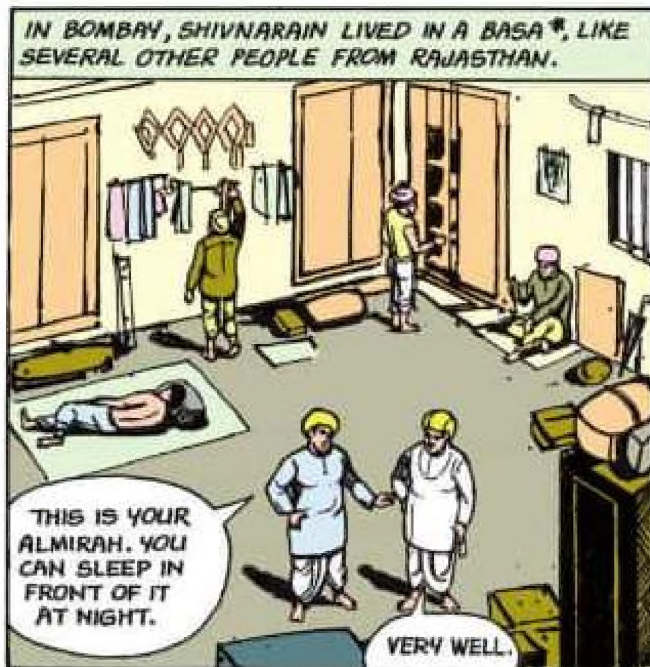


+ BUSINESS ESTABLISHMENT

\* VAISHYA'S DHARMA OR DUTY IS TO CONDUCT BUSINESS OR AGRICULTURE.

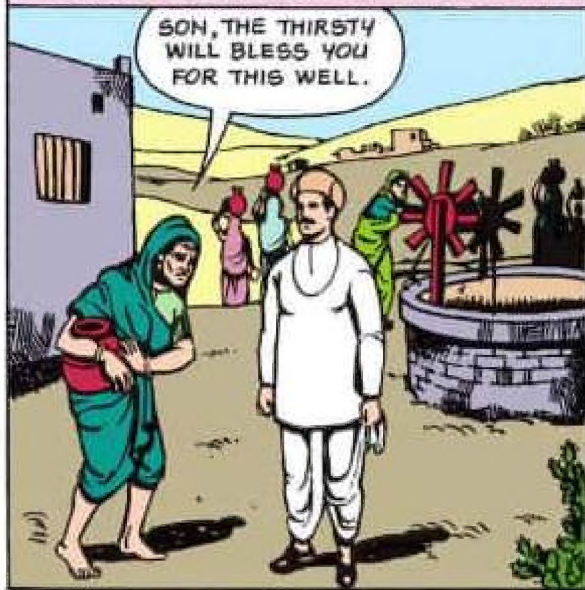
\*\* BUSINESS IN ANOTHER LAND.



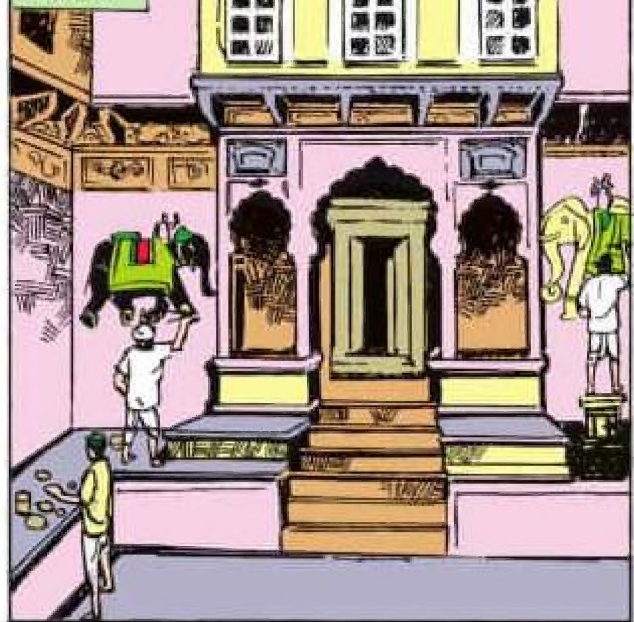




WATER IS THE GREATEST NEED IN THE DESERT. SO, FOLLOWING THE TRADITIONS OF PHILAN - THROPY, SHIVNARAIN ALSO BUILT A PUBLIC WELL.



AND THEN SHIVNARAIN BUILT A HAVELI\* FOR HIS FAMILY.



IN THIS VERY HAVELI SHIVNARAIN'S GRANDSON GHANSHYAM DAS BIRLA WAS BORN ON RAMA NAVAMI IN 1894.



\* A LARGE HOUSE

⊕ EVERY HOUSE SINGS IN PRAISE, 'A SON (KRISHNA) IS BORN IN NANDA'S HOME'



THIS WAS THE THIRD SON OF BALDEO DAS AND YOGESHWARI DEVI.

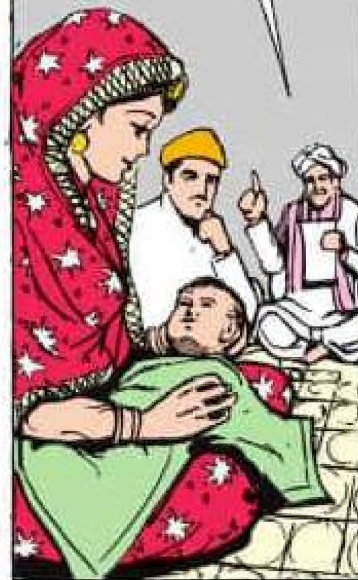
YOU MAY NAME YOUR SON GHANSHYAM DAS...



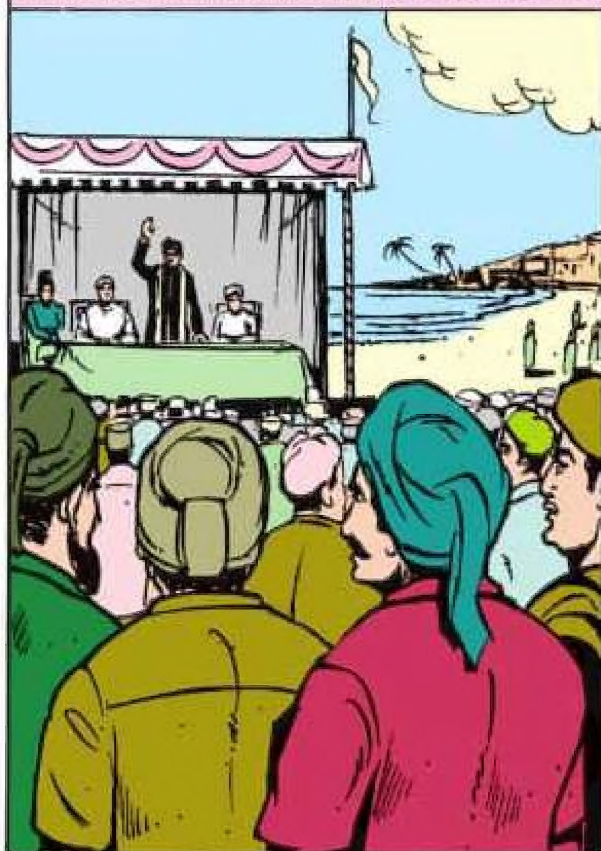
...THIS CHILD IS BORN IN VINAYOG\* HE WILL BE EXCEPTIONALLY FORTUNATE...



...HE SHALL REACH GREAT HEIGHTS OF FAME IN HIS LIFE-TIME.



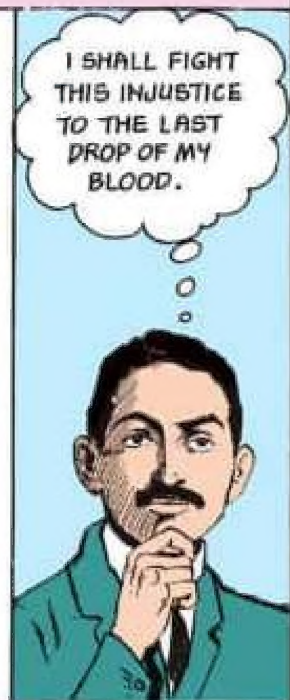
AT THE TIME OF GHANSHYAM DAS' BIRTH INDIA WAS PASSING THROUGH A TURBULENT PHASE. THE ATMOSPHERE WAS SURCHARGED WITH PATRIOTIC FERVOUR. LEADERS LIKE GOKHALE, TILAK, LALA LAJPATRAI AND OTHERS WERE SPEARHEADING THE STRUGGLE.



\* A COMBINATION OF PLANETS (AN ASTROLOGICAL TERM)



AROUND THIS TIME ANOTHER STAR OF INDIA, 25-YEAR-OLD MOHANDAS KARAMCHAND GANDHI, WAS RISING IN DISTANT SOUTH AFRICA.

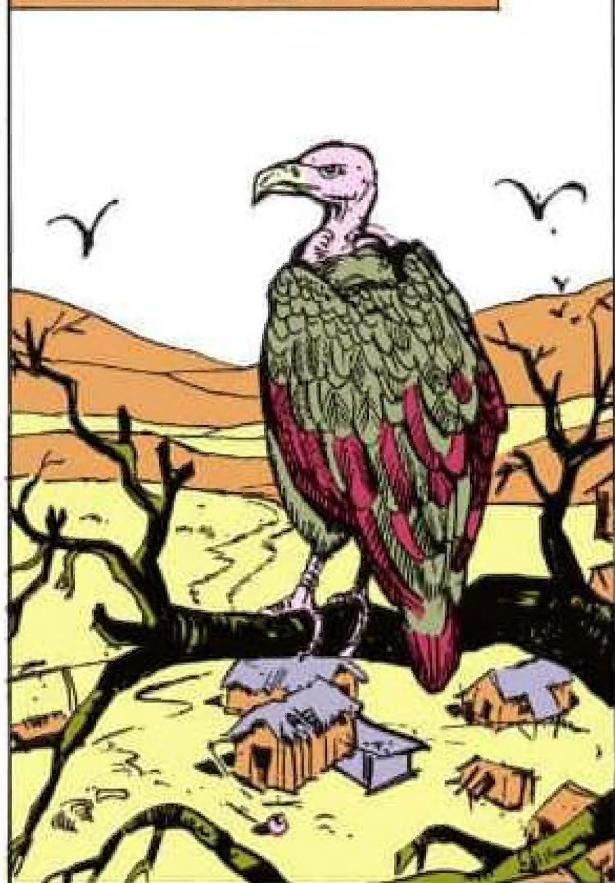


21 YEARS LATER GHANSHYAMDAS WAS TO COME UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF THIS GREAT MAN.

FAR AWAY FROM THE HECTIC ACTIVITY OF THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE WHICH ONE DAY WOULD INSPIRE HIM, GHANSHYAM DAS GREW UP IN THE SURROUNDINGS OF PILANI...



DROUGHT AND FAMINE WERE A COMMON OCCURRENCE IN THE DESERT SURROUNDING PILANI.





IN 1899, GHANSHYAM, WHEN HE WAS A MERE BOY OF 5, SAW A FAMINE OF UNPRECEDENTED SEVERITY AROUND HIM.



HE NEVER FORGOT THE SCENE OF WHOLE FAMILIES DYING OF STARVATION AND DEAD ANIMALS LITTERING THE LANDSCAPE.



GHANSHYAM DAS HAD HIS EARLY SCHOOLING AT PILANI.

SAY SHRI  
GANESHAYA  
NAMAH.

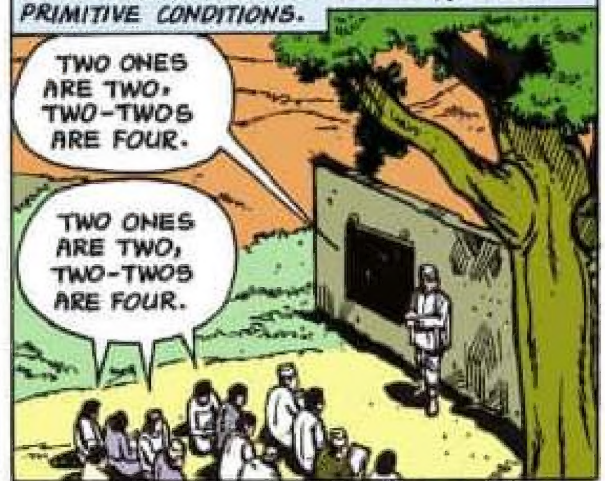
SHRI GANESHAYA  
NAMAH.



GHANSHYAM RECEIVED HIS PRIMARY EDUCATION UNDER VERY ORDINARY, ALMOST PRIMITIVE CONDITIONS.

TWO ONES  
ARE TWO.  
TWO-TWOS  
ARE FOUR.

TWO ONES  
ARE TWO,  
TWO-TWOS  
ARE FOUR.



BUT THIS SCHOOLING WAS INTERRUPTED SOMETIMES ON ACCOUNT OF THE WEATHER AND SOMETIMES FOR OTHER REASONS.



CHILDREN, THE CLASS WILL NOT BE HELD TODAY. IT IS GOING TO RAIN. YOU HAD BETTER RUSH HOME.

YA-A-AY





THE BOY'S EDUCATION AT THE VILLAGE WAS FINISHED WHEN HE WAS NINE. THEREAFTER HE WENT TO LIVE WITH HIS GRANDFATHER SHIVNARAIN WHO HAD SHIFTED HIS HEADQUARTERS TO CALCUTTA.



SOME HALF-HEARTED ATTEMPTS WERE MADE IN CALCUTTA TO PUT GHANSHYAM AGAIN IN SCHOOL.

SETHJI, YOU SHOULD SEND GHANSHYAM TO A GOOD SCHOOL.

THERE IS NO NEED. A BUSINESSMAN'S SON GETS REAL TRAINING BY PARTICIPATING IN BUSINESS. MOREOVER...



...SCHOOL EDUCATION PUTS CHILDREN BEYOND THE CONTROL OF THEIR ELDERS.

BUT TIMES ARE CHANGING. LACK OF PROPER EDUCATION MAY SOON BECOME A HANDICAP.



HOWEVER, SHIVNARAIN BIRLA DID SEND HIS RELUCTANT GRANDSON TO SCHOOL.



GHANSHYAM'S RELUCTANCE TO GO TO SCHOOL WAS FURTHER STRENGTHENED BY THE ATTITUDE OF CITY BOYS TOWARDS HIM.

INSTEAD OF ATTENDING HIS CLASS, HE ROAMED THE STREETS OF CALCUTTA.





FINALLY BALDEODAS BROUGHT HIS SON TO BOMBAY AND INDUCTED HIM INTO HIS BUSINESS THERE.

YOUR PRICE IS TOO HIGH.

IT IS NOT. I MUST EARN AT LEAST THE INTEREST ON MY INVESTMENT.

BALDEODAS NOW FELT THAT IN BRITISH-RULED INDIA, KNOWLEDGE OF ENGLISH WAS ESSENTIAL. HENCE A TUTOR WAS APPOINTED FOR HIS SON.

YOU SHOULD CONCLUDE YOUR BUSINESS LETTERS WITH THE STATEMENT—"TO GIVE TOTAL SATISFACTION TO THE CLIENT IS OUR MOTTO".

...IS OUR... MOTTO...

GHANSHYAM DAS HAD INHERITED THE KEEN BUSINESS ACUMEN OF HIS GRANDFATHER. AT THE AGE OF 13 HE STARTED HIS INDEPENDENT BUSINESS IN CALCUTTA.

YOU ARE TAKING A BIG RISK. WHY HAVE YOU BOUGHT SO MUCH JUTE?

WELL, THE PRICE OF JUTE WILL GO UP NOW AND I WILL EARN A HUGE PROFIT.

SOLD!  
SOLD!

BOUGHT!  
BOUGHT!

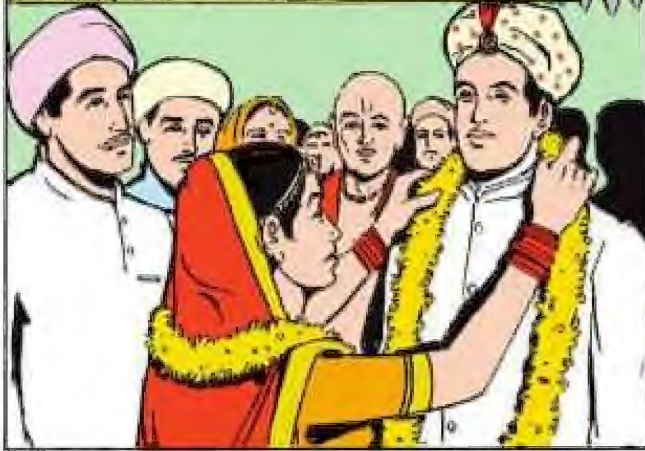
BEFORE LONG GHANSHYAM DAS BECAME A VERY SUCCESSFUL BROKER.

YOU WERE RIGHT, GHANSHYAM. THE PRICES HAVE GONE UP.

IF YOU HAVE THE GOODS AND THE CAPACITY TO HOLD THEM, YOU CANNOT LOSE.

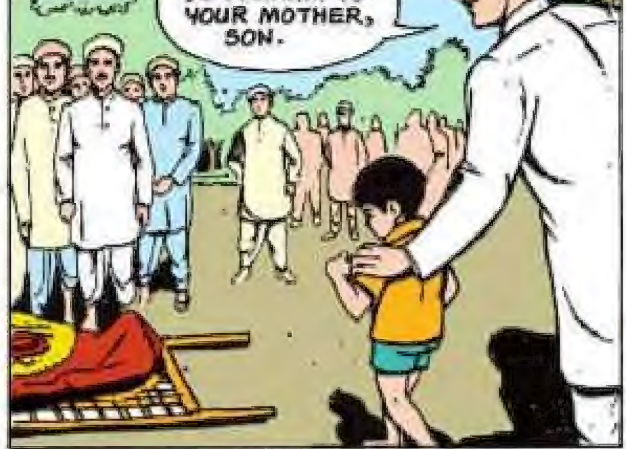


THOUGH GHANSHYAM DAS WAS LUCKY IN BUSINESS, HE WAS NOT SO FORTUNATE IN HIS FAMILY LIFE. HE MARRIED DURGA DEVI WHEN HE WAS 14...

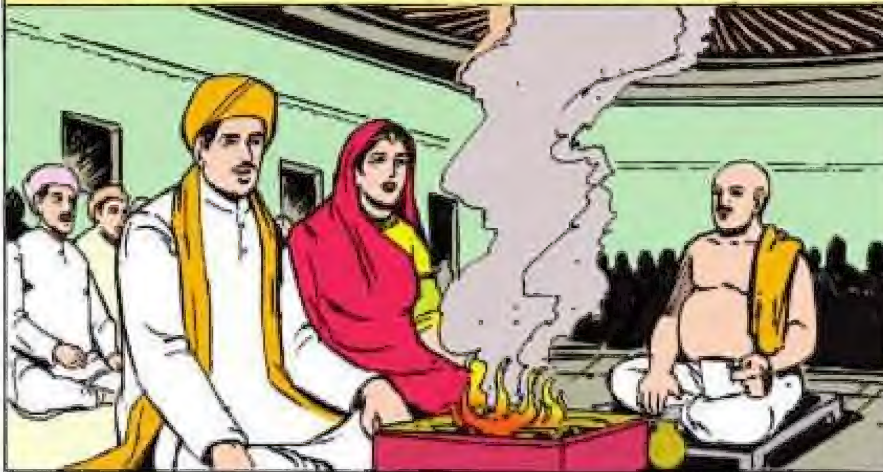


...AND AT 19, HE LOST HER AFTER SHE BORE HIM A SON WHO WAS NAMED LAXMI NIVAS.

DO PRANAM TO YOUR MOTHER, SON.



THEN HE MARRIED MAHADEVI AND FOUND HAPPINESS IN HER.



MAHADEVI BORE HIM FIVE CHILDREN— TWO SONS, KRISHNA KUMAR AND BASANT KUMAR...



...AND THREE DAUGHTERS — CHANDRAKALA, ANUSUYA AND SHANTI. ALL SEEMED WELL...



...BUT FATE WAS CRUEL TO GHANSHYAM DAS. MAHADEVI CONTRACTED TUBERCULOSIS, AN INCURABLE DISEASE IN THOSE DAYS.





AND AT THE AGE OF 32, GHANSHYAM DAS BECAME A WIDOWER AGAIN.



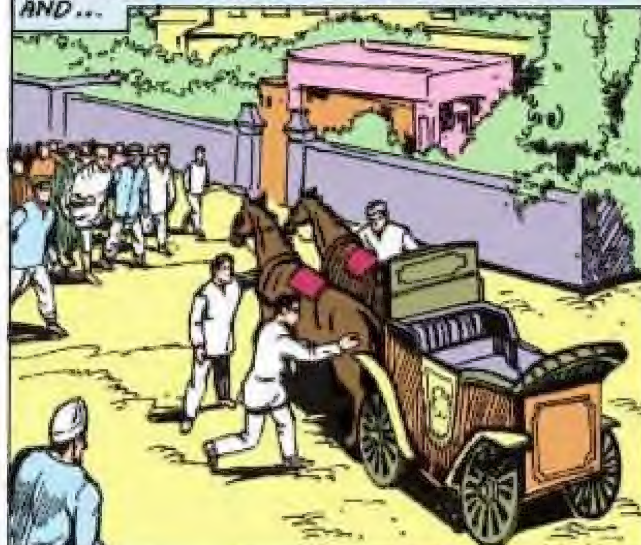
BY NOW GHANSHYAM DAS HAD COME UNDER THE STRONG INFLUENCE OF GANDHI WHO ADVISED HIM TO REMAIN CELIBATE.



GHANSHYAM DAS HEEDED THE ADVICE AND DID NOT MARRY AGAIN. HE HAD COME INTO CONTACT WITH GANDHI WHEN HE WAS ONLY 19...



... WHEN GANDHI CAME TO CALCUTTA. YOUNG MEN REMOVED THE HORSES OF GANDHI'S BUGGY AND...



... PULLED IT THEMSELVES ON THE STREETS. GHANSHYAM DAS WAS ONE OF THEM.





GHANSHYAM DAS ACTIVELY PARTICIPATED IN THE ROUSING RECEPTION GIVEN TO GANDHI.

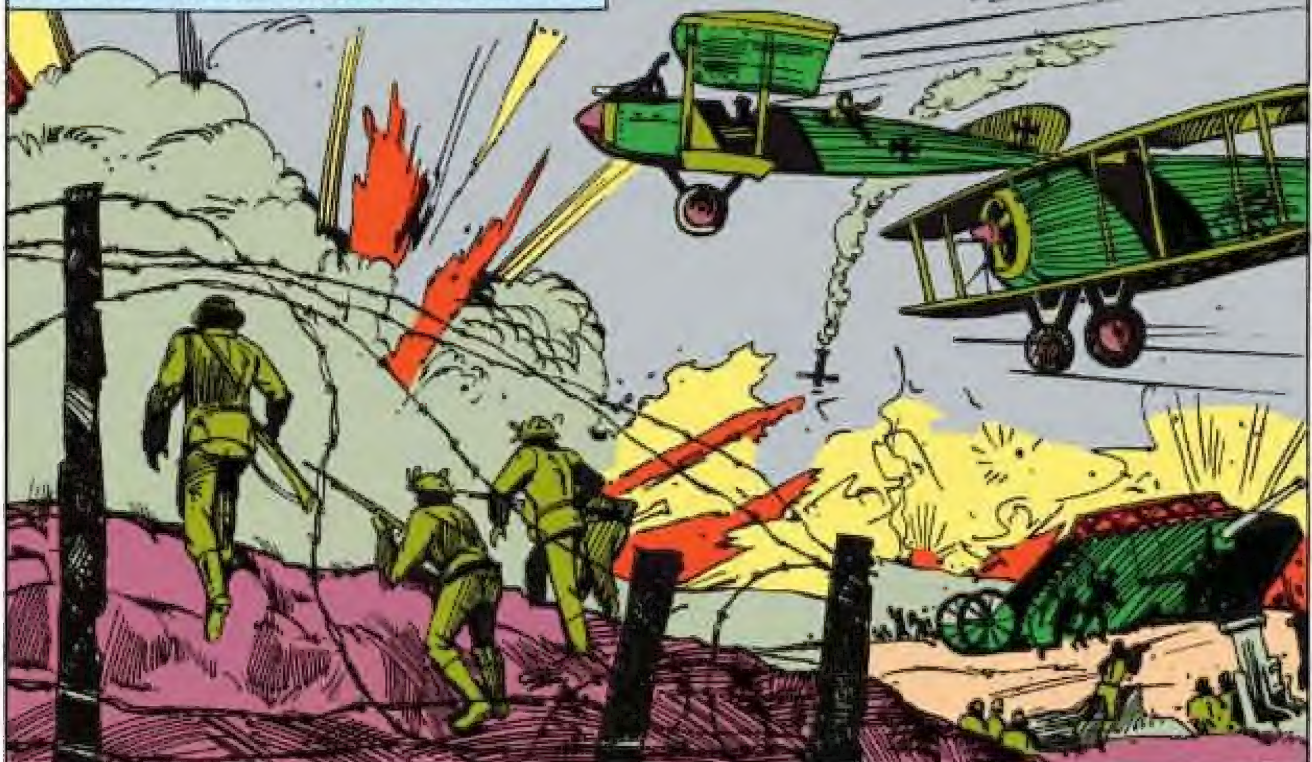


THUS STARTED GHANSHYAM DAS' LONG AND INSPIRING ASSOCIATION WITH GANDHI WHO LATER BECAME A FATHER FIGURE TO HIM.



THOUGH IN LATER YEARS GHANSHYAM DAS BIRLA PARTICIPATED IN MANY WELFARE ACTIVITIES OF GANDHI, BUSINESS REMAINED HIS PRIMARY INTEREST.

SHIVNARAIN AND HIS SON BALDEO DAS HAD BUILT UP A PROFITABLE BUSINESS. AND THEN THE FIRST WORLD-WAR BROKE OUT.

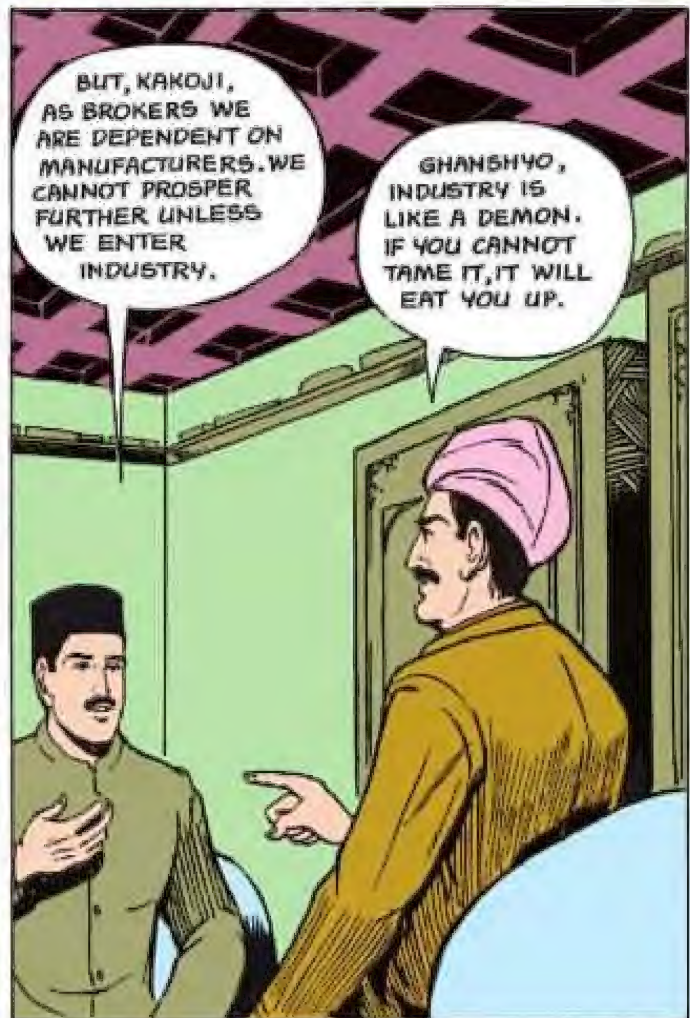
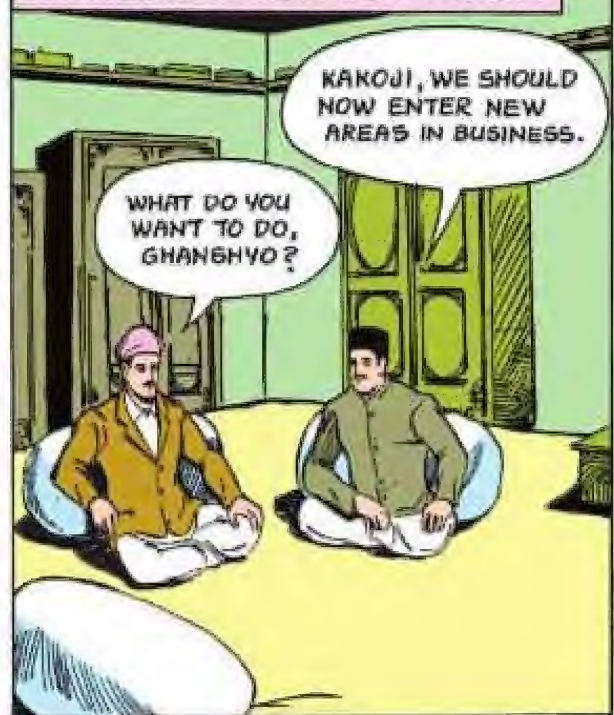




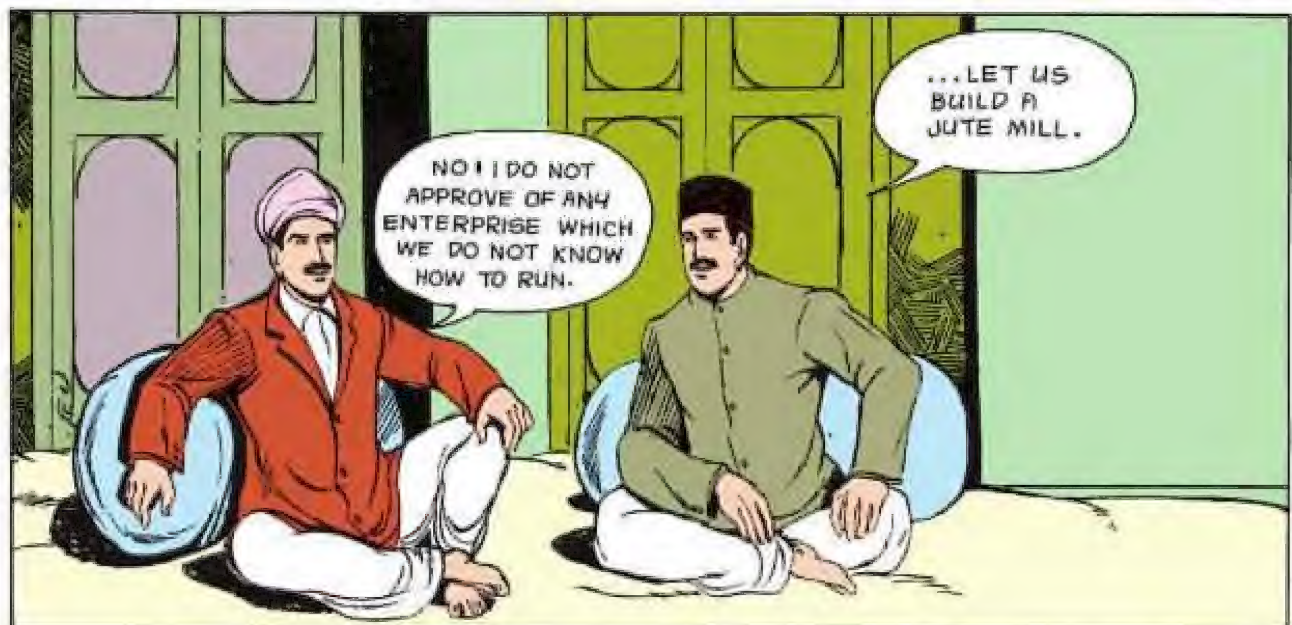
THE WAR BROUGHT A BOOM IN BUSINESS...



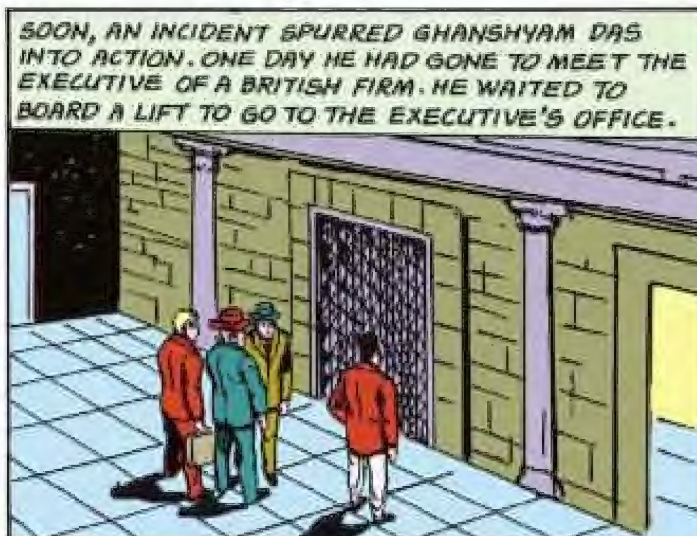
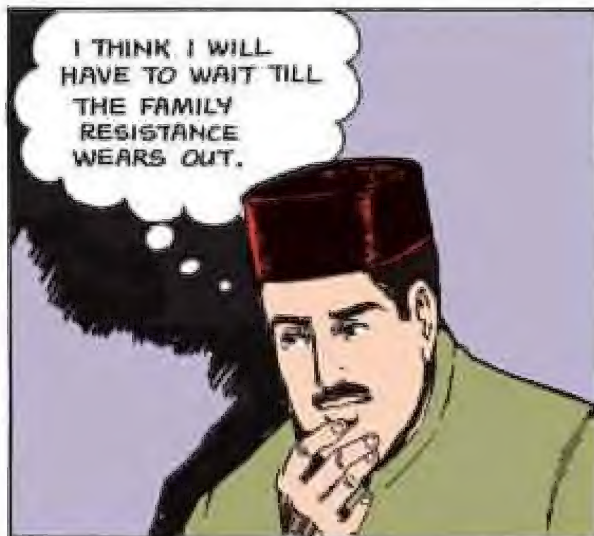
... BY THE TIME THE WAR ENDED THE BIRLA FAMILY HAD AMASSED ASSETS WORTH 80 LAKH RUPEES. SOON AFTERWARDS—













A FUMING GHANSHYAM DAS CLIMBED UP THE STAIRS...



BUT WHEN HE REACHED THE OFFICE OF THE BRITISH EXECUTIVE HE RECEIVED ANOTHER RUDE SHOCK.



I HAVE NO TIME TO WASTE ON THAT GOOD-FOR-NOTHING BLACK NATIVE.

GOOD FOR NOTHING!

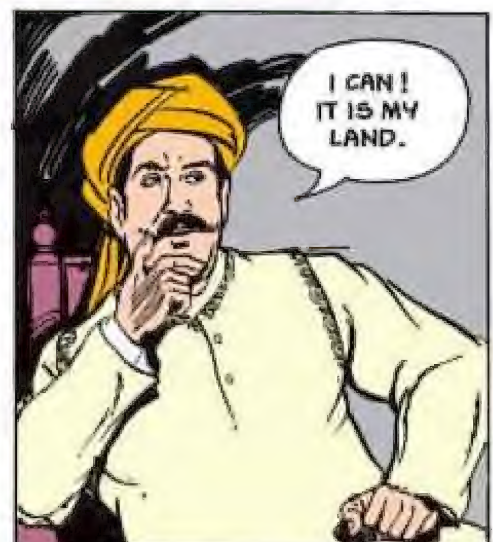
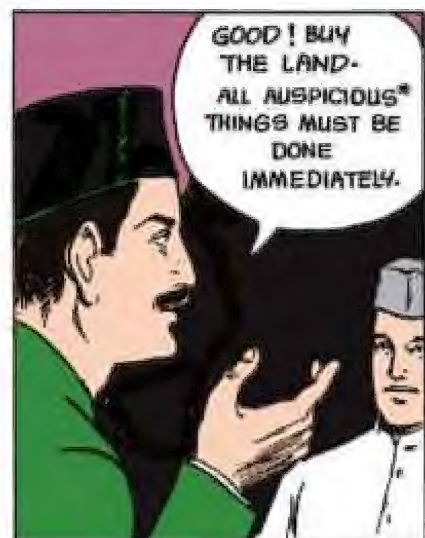
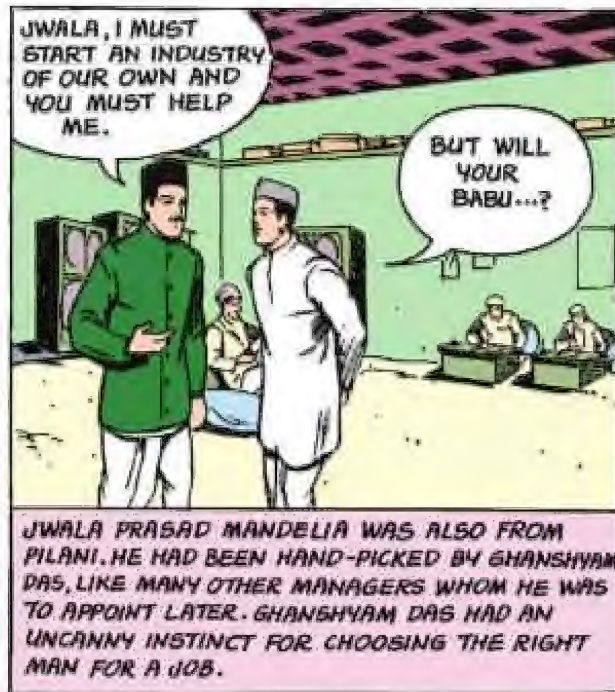
...THESE BRITISH OFFICERS ARE RUDE. SINCE THEY CONTROL THE GOVERNMENT AND INDUSTRY THEY THINK TOO MUCH OF THEMSELVES...



...IN A WAY WE INDIANS ARE ALSO TO BLAME. WE DO NOT TAKE ANY INITIATIVE.









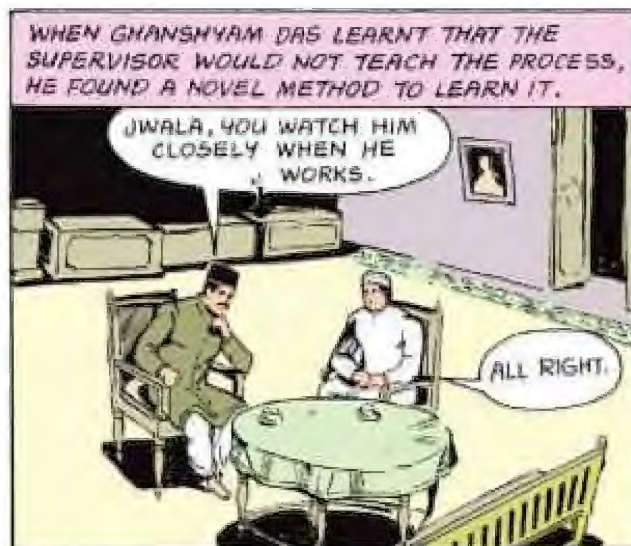
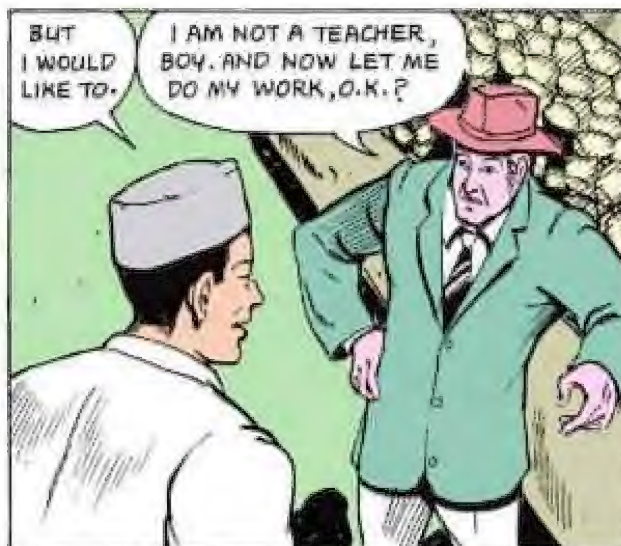
DESPITE THE LUKEWARM ATTITUDE OF HIS OWN FAMILY AND THE HURDLES PLACED BY THE BRITISH, GHANSHYAM DAS EVENTUALLY BUILT THE JUTE MILL.



BUT MARCHING AHEAD WAS NOT EASY. THE FIRST STUMBLING BLOCK WAS PATERSON, THE SCOTCH SUPERVISOR OF THE MILL.









THE SITUATION LOOKED HOPELESS, BUT JWALA PRASAD CONTINUED THE SEARCH. FINALLY, IN A SHOP OF SECOND-HAND BOOKS—



IT WAS THE BOOK HE WAS LOOKING FOR.



THE PROBLEM OF JUTE-PROCESSING WAS THUS SOLVED BUT OTHER PROBLEMS WERE CREATED FOR THE NEW INDUSTRIALIST.



BUT THE IMPERIAL BANK REFUSED TO GIVE LOAN.



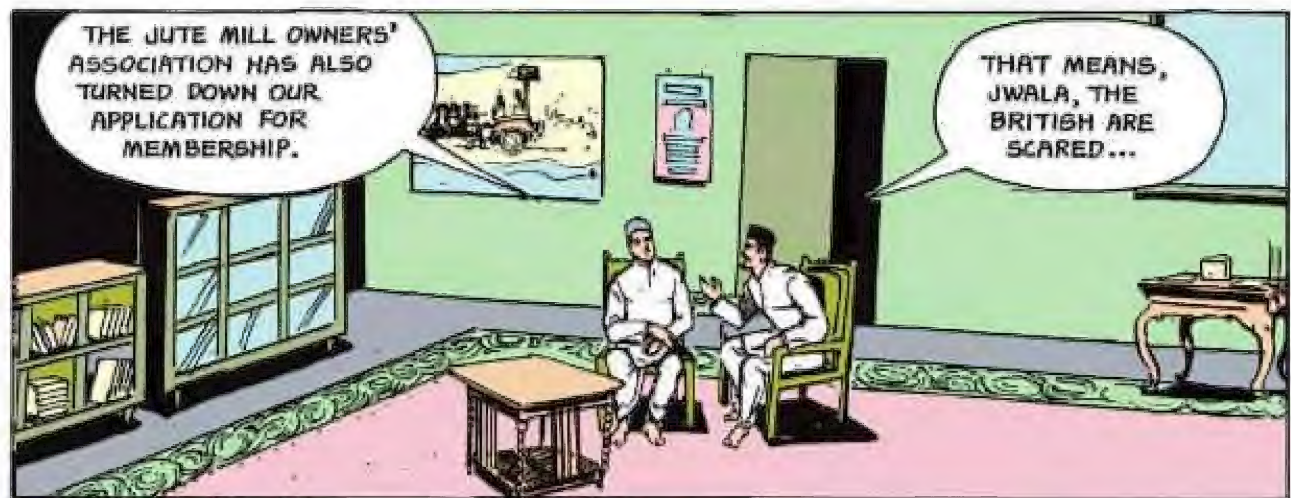
SOON AFTER FLOATING SHARES —



BUT THE TROUBLES WERE FAR FROM OVER.



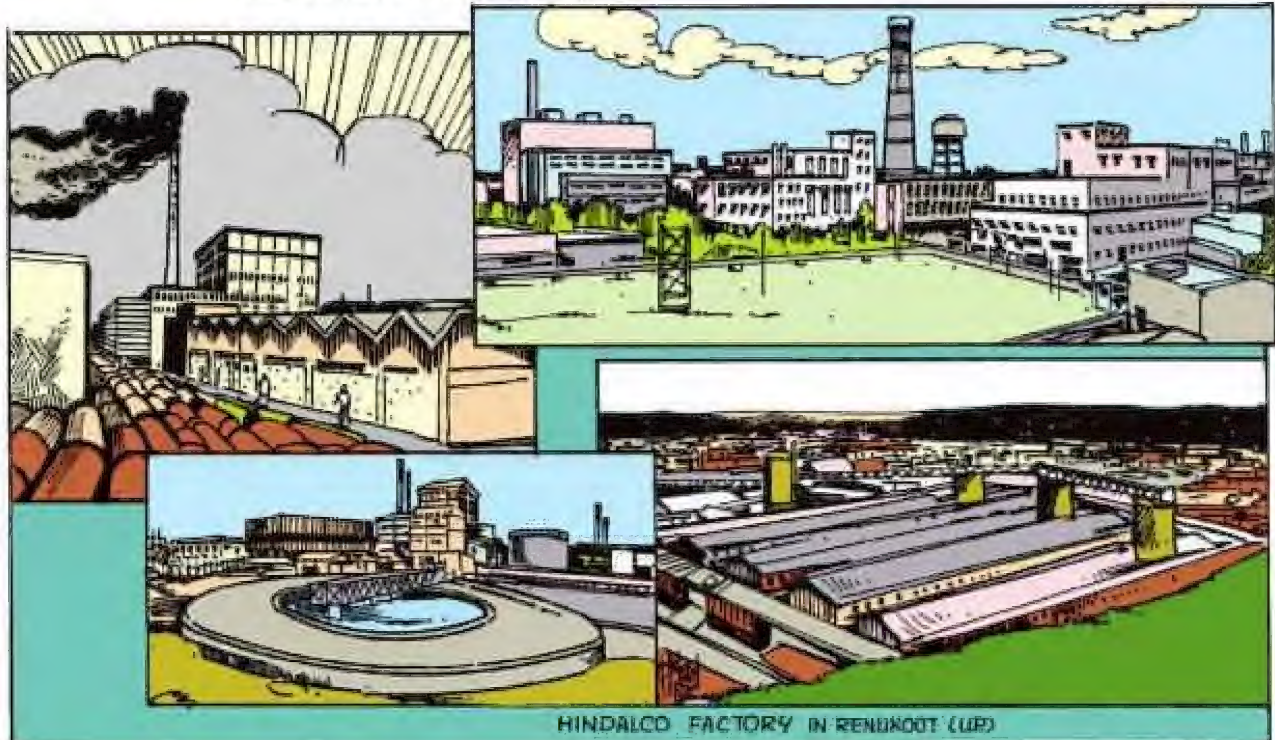






AND FIGHT BIRLA DID. HE NOT ONLY SUCCEEDED IN OVERCOMING THE INITIAL HURDLES, BUT WENT ON TO FOUND THE HOUSE OF BIRLAS. IN THIS TASK OF COURSE HE WAS AMPLY SUPPORTED BY HIS BROTHERS, JUGAL KISHORE, RAMESHWAR DAS AND BRIJ MOHAN. BIRLAS BUILT INDUSTRIES NOT ONLY IN THE COUNTRY BUT ABROAD TOO. SOME OF THE MOST IMPORTANT CREATIONS OF GHANSHYAM DAS WERE THE HINDUSTAN ALUMINIUM CORPORATION, THE GWALIOR RAYON, AND THE UNITED COMMERCIAL BANK.

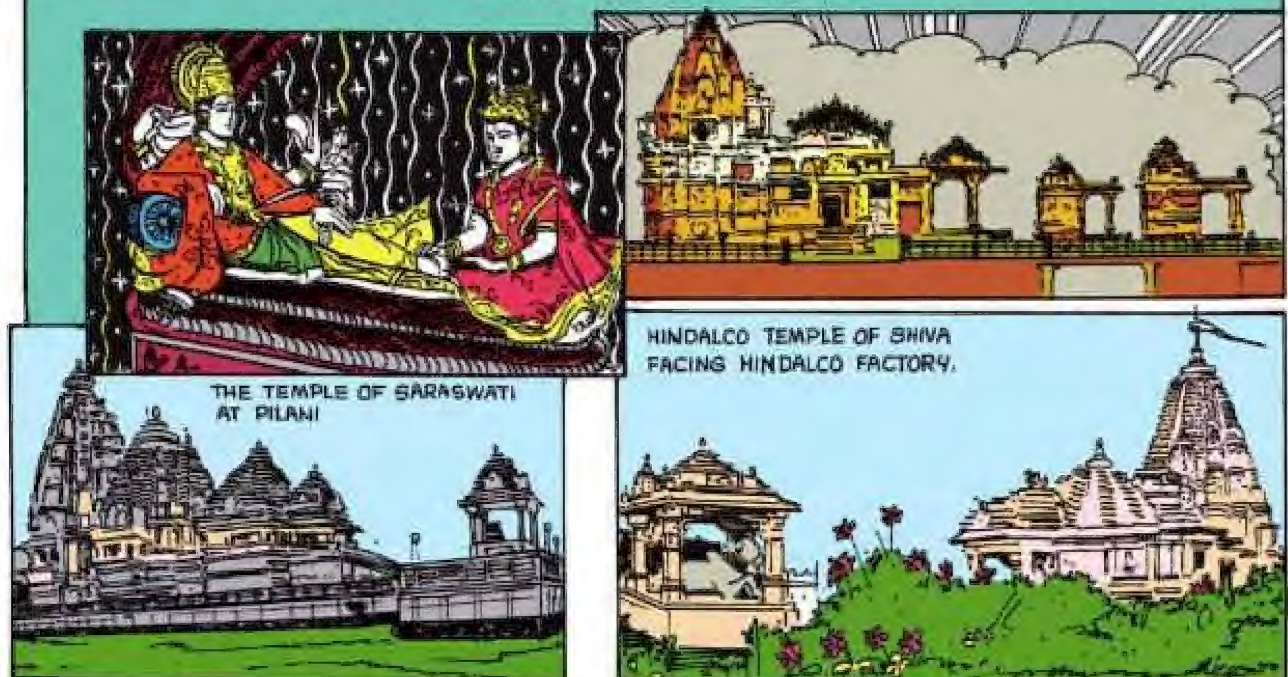
GWALIOR RAYON FACTORY AT NAGDA



HINDALCO FACTORY IN RENUKOOT (UP)

GHANSHYAM DAS BIRLA NOT ONLY KNEW HOW TO EARN MONEY, HE ALSO KNEW HOW TO SPEND IT WELL. SCORES OF TEMPLES, HOSPITALS AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS SPREAD ALL OVER THE COUNTRY AND SOME ABROAD TOO BEAR TESTIMONY TO THE CHARITABLE SPIRIT OF THE BIRLAS.

THE TEMPLE OF VISHNU AT NAGDA

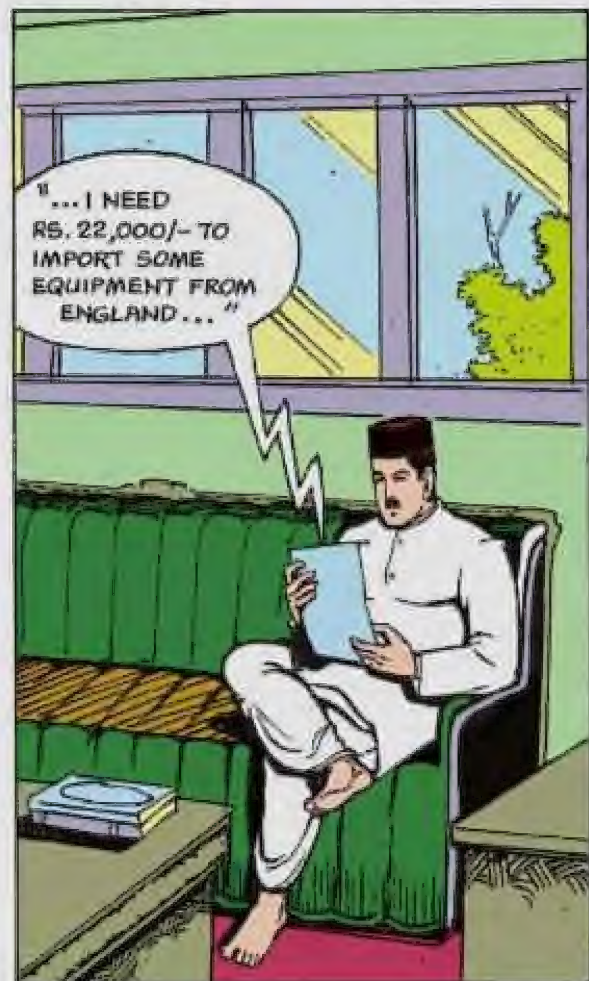


THE TEMPLE OF SARASWATI AT PILANI

HINDALCO TEMPLE OF SHIVA FACING HINDALCO FACTORY.



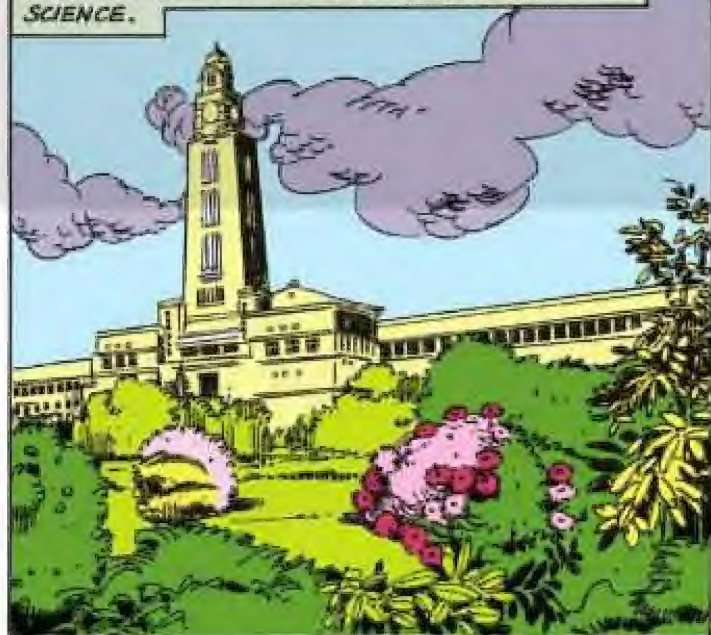
BUT THE PHILANTHROPY OF BIRLAS WAS NOT CONFINED TO RELIGION. MANY OTHER LAUDABLE CAUSES WERE SUPPORTED BY THEM. ONE SUCH CASE WAS THAT OF THE NOTED SCIENTIST C.V. RAMAN.



GHANSHYAM DAS PROMPTLY ARRANGED TO SEND HIM THE REQUIRED MONEY. C.V. RAMAN DISCOVERED A PHENOMENON WHICH LATER CAME TO BE KNOWN AS THE RAMAN EFFECT AND WON HIM THE NOBEL PRIZE IN PHYSICS IN 1930.

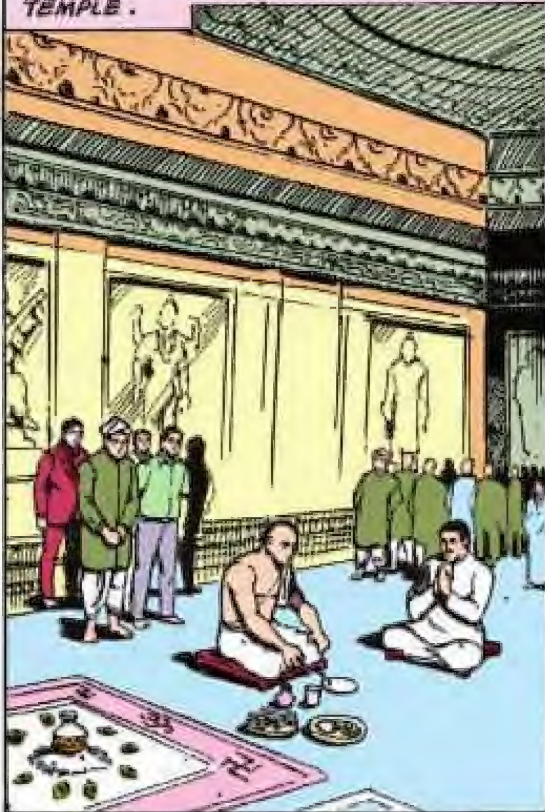


OF THE MANY CAUSES THAT THE CHARITY OF THE BIRLAS SUPPORTED, EDUCATION WAS THE MOST NOTABLE. AT PILANI, THE ANCESTRAL VILLAGE OF THE BIRLAS, WHERE GHANSHYAM DAS HAD ONLY RUDIMENTARY EDUCATION, STANDS ONE OF THE FINEST TECHNICAL INSTITUTIONS IN THE COUNTRY — THE BIRLA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY AND SCIENCE.

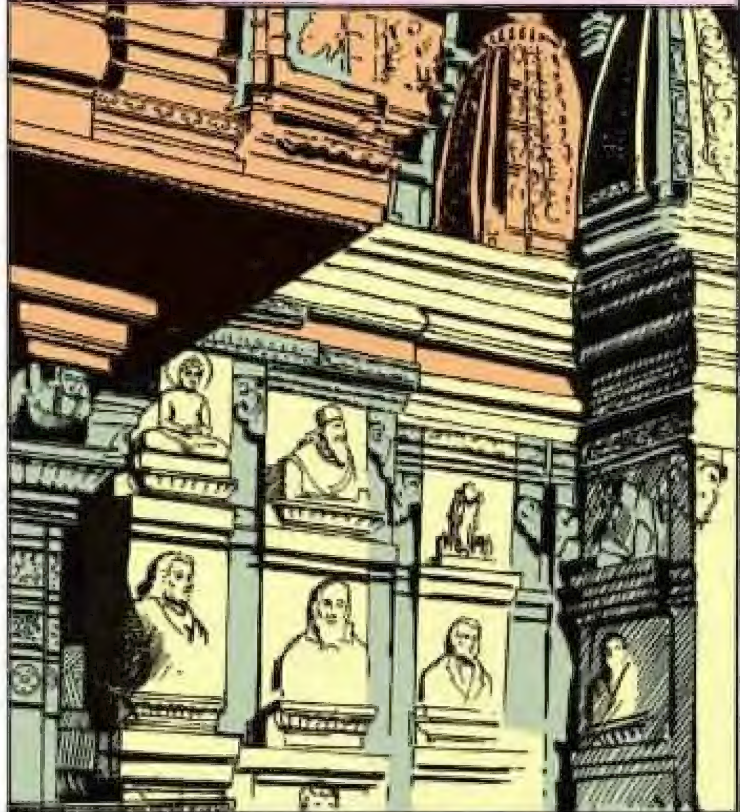




IN THE HEART OF THE CAMPUS OF THE DURLA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY STANDS AN UNUSUAL SARASWATI TEMPLE .



THE WALLS OF THE MAIN BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE ARE ADORNED WITH FIGURES OF RENOWNED SAINTS, SCIENTISTS AND SCHOLARS OF THE WORLD.

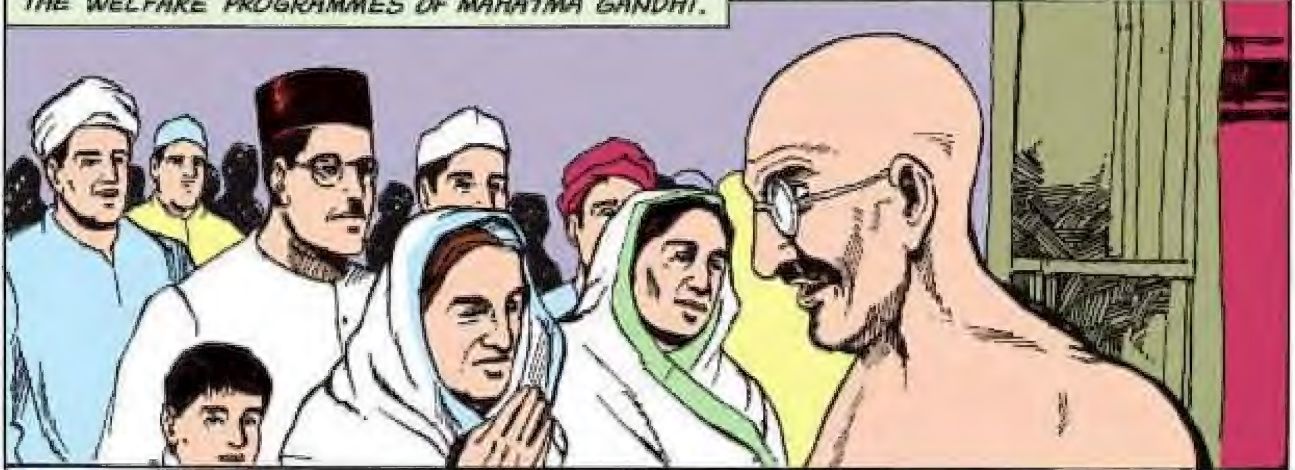


OTHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS WHICH RECEIVED AID FROM THE HOUSE OF BIRLAS INCLUDED THE ALIGARH MUSLIM UNIVERSITY.

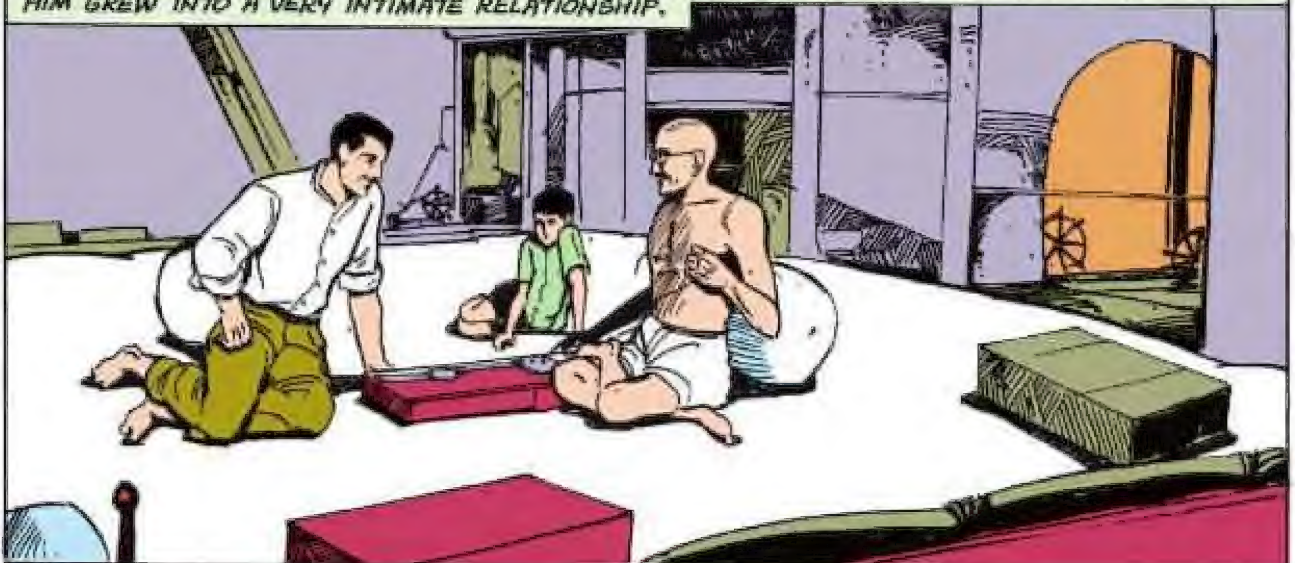




AND THE MOST SIGNIFICANT AID FOR SOCIAL IMPROVEMENT WAS GIVEN BY GHANSHYAM DAS TO THE WELFARE PROGRAMMES OF MAHATMA GANDHI.



SINCE HIS FIRST CONTACT WITH GANDHI IN CALCUTTA, GHANSHYAM DAS' ASSOCIATION WITH HIM GREW INTO A VERY INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP.



PRIOR TO MEETING GANDHI, GHANSHYAM DAS HAD A BRIEF ACQUAINTANCE WITH REVOLUTIONARIES.





ONE DAY ONE OF THE REVOLUTIONARIES APPROACHED GHANSHYAM DAS —

GHANSHYAM, MAY I LEAVE THESE PACKETS IN YOUR ROOM?

YES.



I WILL COLLECT THEM LATER.

ANY TIME.



GHANSHYAM DAS DID NOT KNOW THAT THE BOXES CONTAINED PISTOLS AND CARTRIDGES.

GHANSHYAM DAS WAS NOT IN WHEN THE POLICE RAIDED HIS ROOM.

SEARCH THE ROOM THOROUGHLY.

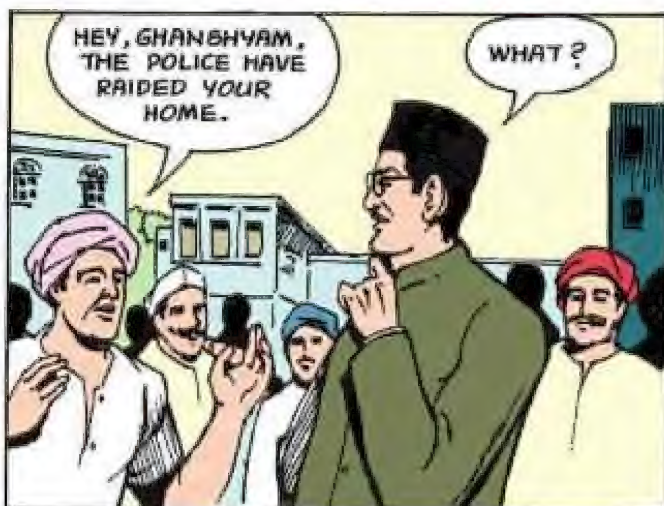


BUT ONE OF GHANSHYAM DAS'S FRIENDS HAD REMOVED THE BOXES AND DUMPED THEM INTO THE RIVER HOOGHLY.

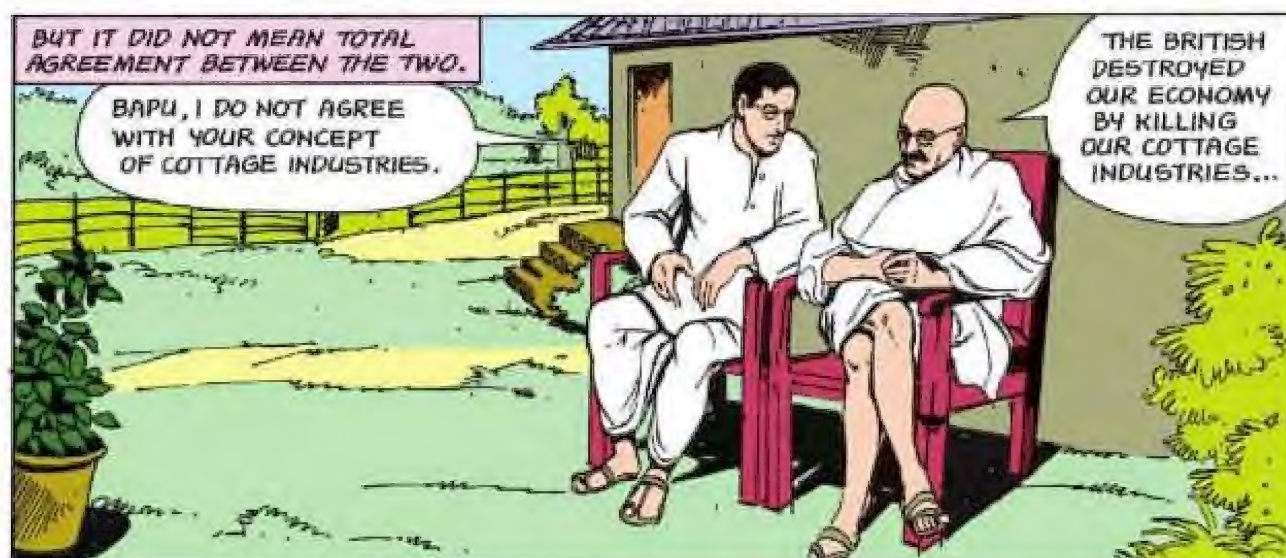
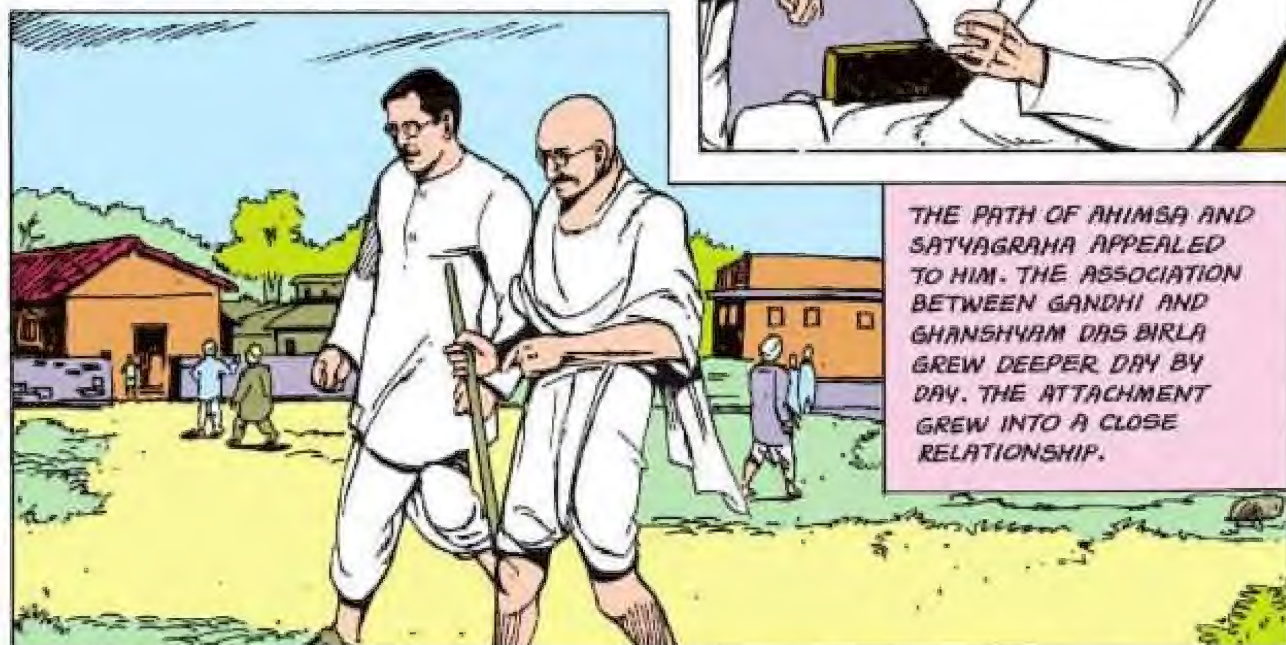
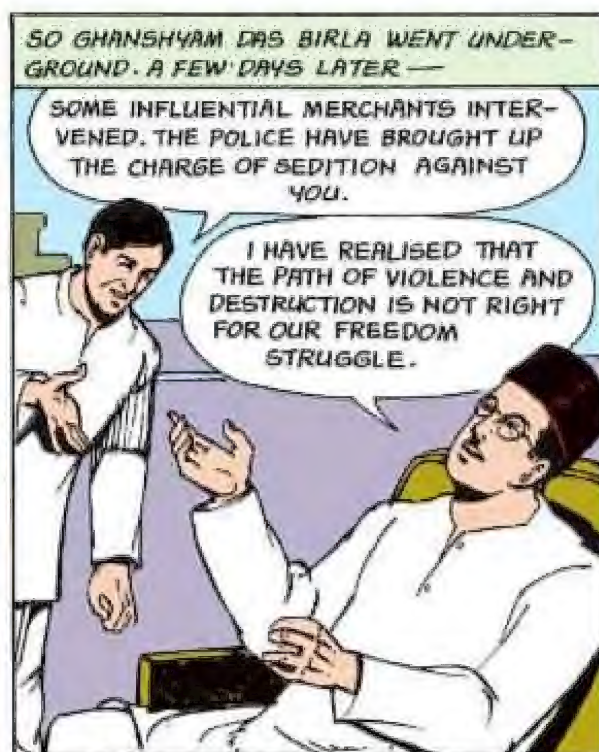


HEY, GHANSHYAM, THE POLICE HAVE RAIDED YOUR HOME.

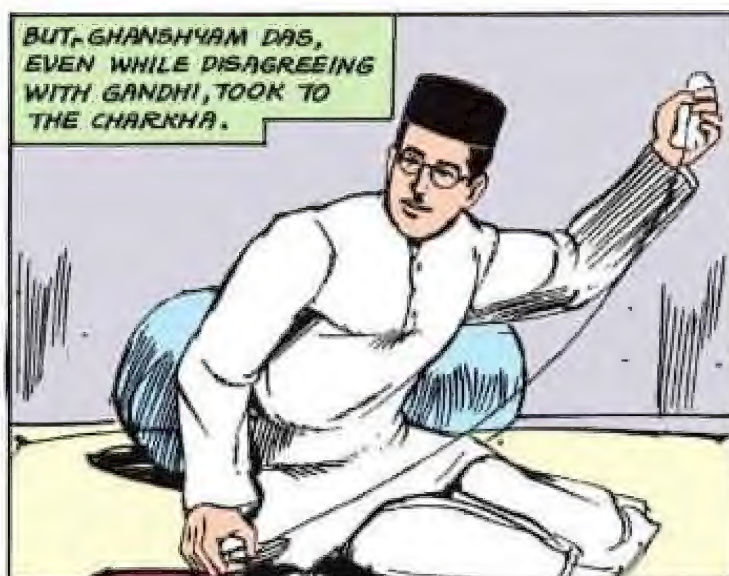
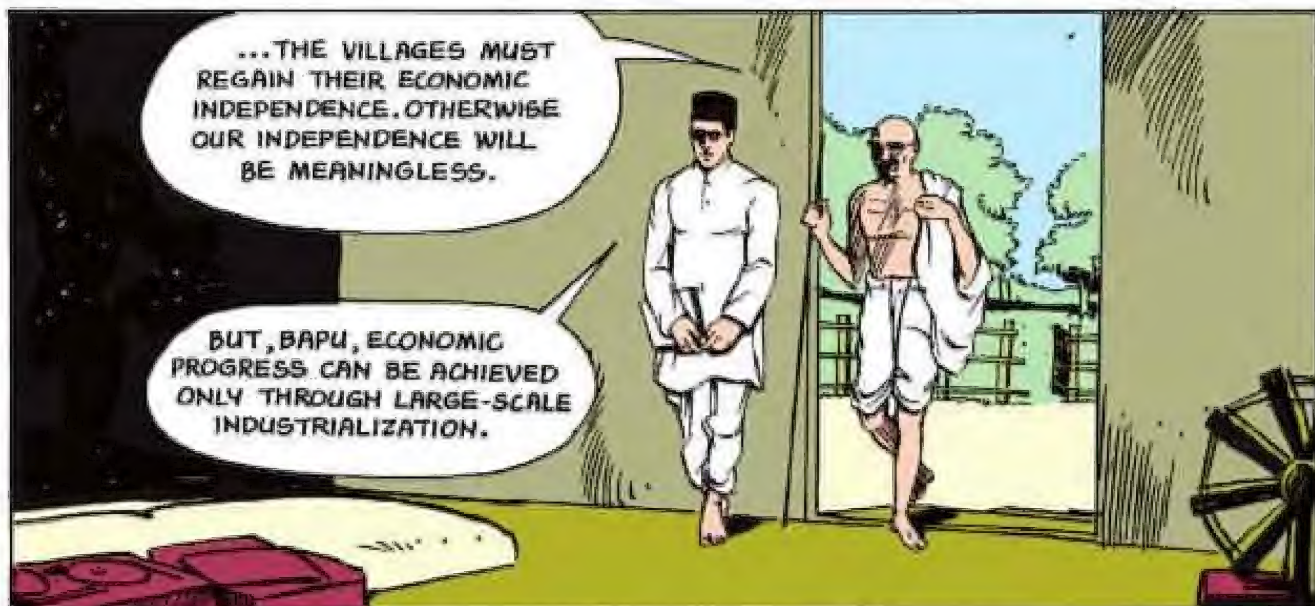
WHAT?













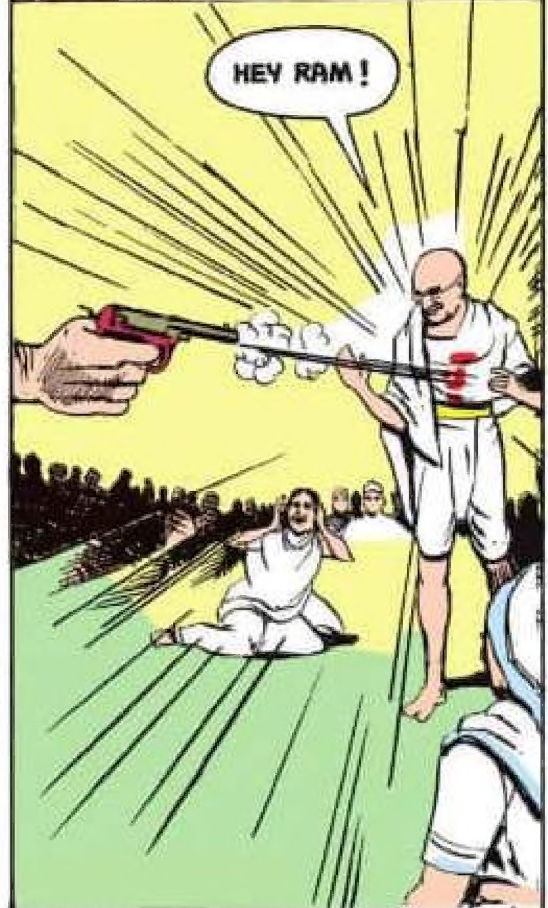
MEANWHILE, THE CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE MOVEMENT LAUNCHED BY GANDHI WAS GAINING MOMENTUM. LATER CAME THE GANDHI-IRWIN PACT.



THE GANDHI-IRWIN PACT PAVED THE WAY FOR THE SECOND ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE IN 1931, WHEN GANDHI REPRESENTED THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS. GHANSHYAM DAS BIRLA WAS INVITED AS A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE INDIAN BUSINESS COMMUNITY.

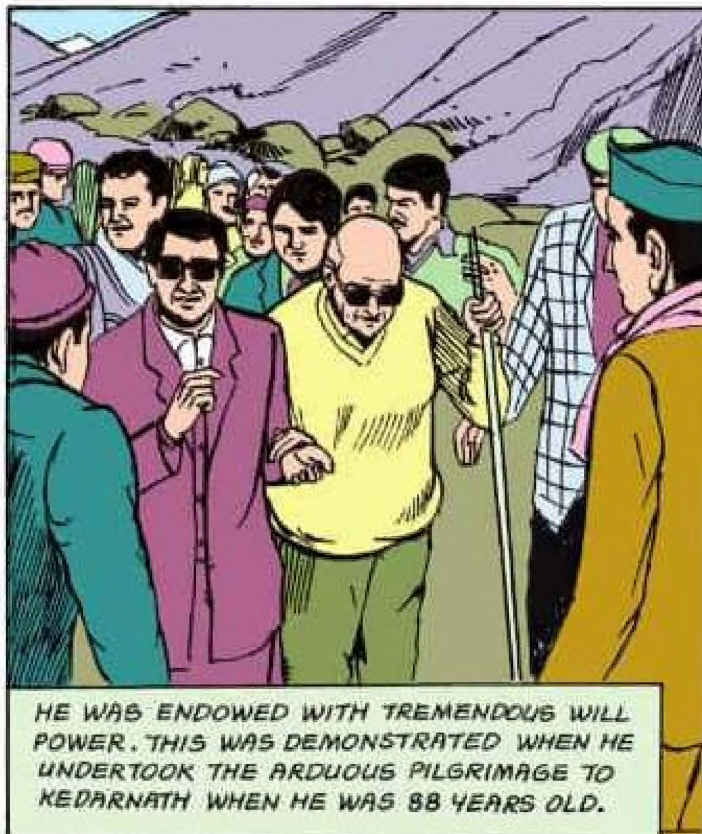
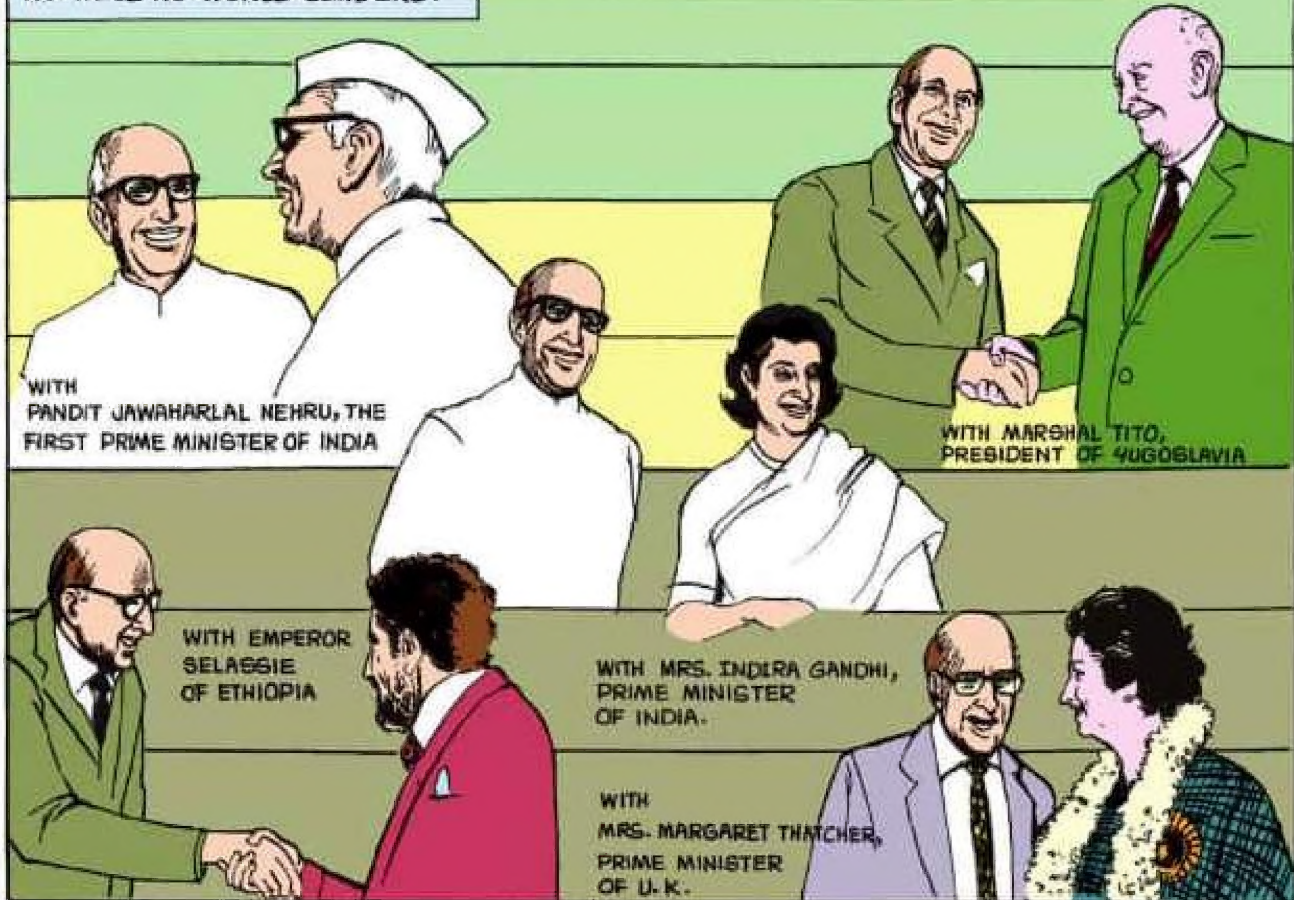


THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GANDHI AND BIRLA WAS SO CLOSE THAT GANDHI STAYED AT BIRLA HOUSE WHILE IN DELHI. IRONICALLY IT WAS HERE THAT HE WAS MURDERED.

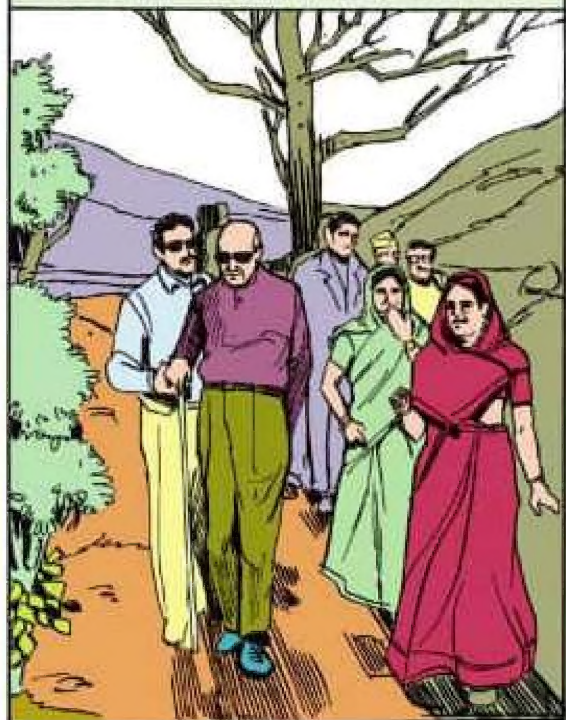




BUT BIRLA ALSO HAD CLOSE AND CORDIAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH MANY OTHER INDIAN AS WELL AS WORLD LEADERS.



WHEN MANY YOUNGER PEOPLE WERE BORNE IN PALANQUINS, GHANSHYAM DAS CHOSE TO TRUDGE ALL THE WAY.



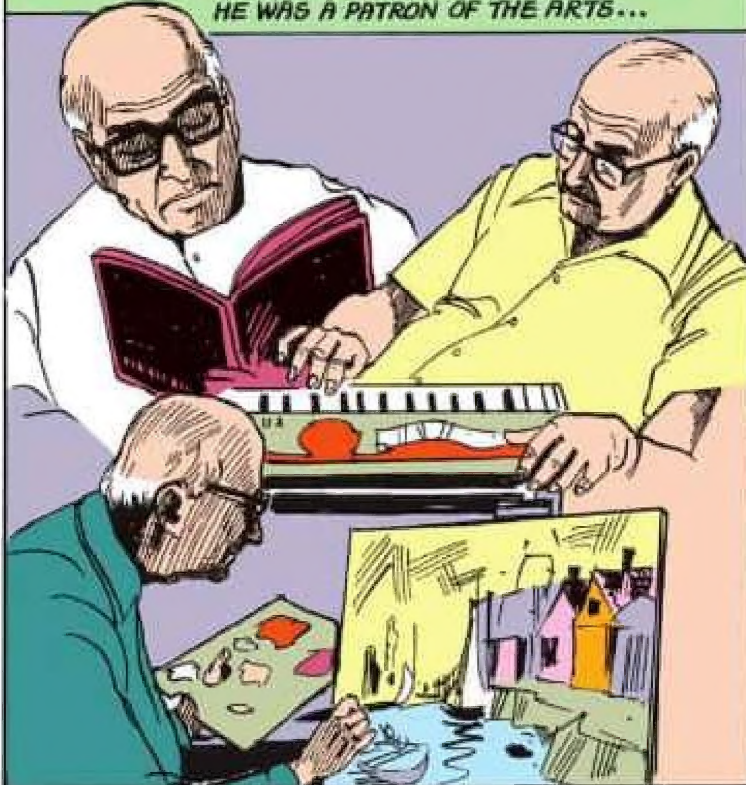


WHENEVER FATIGUE OVERTOOK HIM...



...THE WARM, TENDER HANDS OF SARALA, HIS DAUGHTER-IN-LAW, AND OTHER NEAR AND DEAR ONES BROUGHT HIM COMFORT.

GHANSHYAM DAS BIRLA WAS A MAN OF VISION. HE HAD LITTLE ACADEMIC EDUCATION, BUT HE WAS DISCIPLINED IN THE SCHOOL OF LIFE. AND IN THE COURSE OF HIS VARIED CAREER HE GATHERED A GREAT DEAL OF EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE. ALSO, HE WAS A PATRON OF THE ARTS...



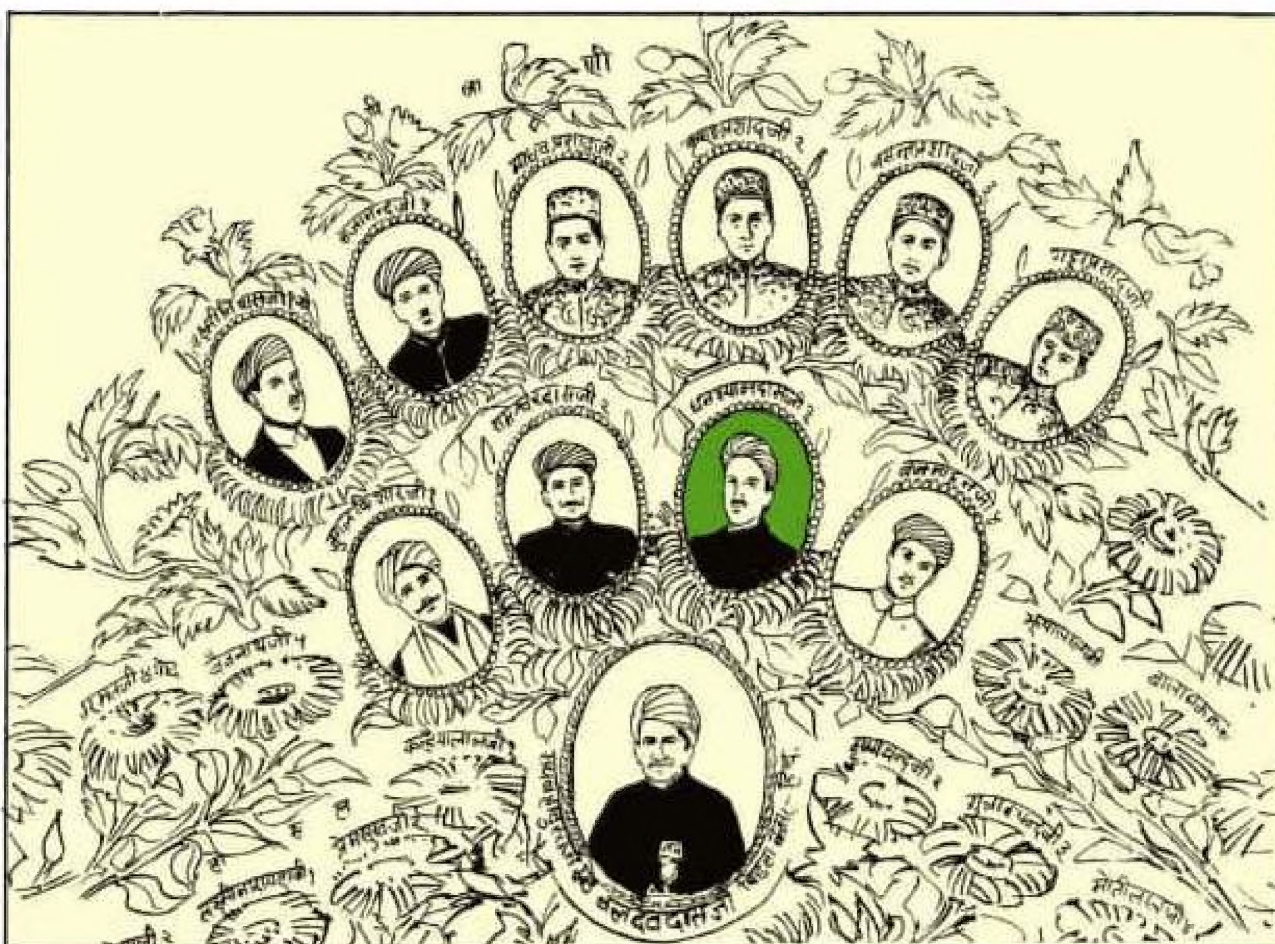
...IN RECOGNITION OF HIS WORK THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT OFFERED HIM A KNIGHTHOOD. BUT HE TURNED IT DOWN. IN INDEPENDENT INDIA THE PADMA VIBHUSHAN WAS AWARDED TO HIM IN 1957.



A GLORIOUS LIFE CAME TO AN END IN LONDON ON JUNE 11, 1983. THAT MORNING AS USUAL, HE SET OUT ON HIS MORNING WALK.



SUDDENLY HE COLLAPSED AND DIED. ACCORDING TO HIS WISH HE WAS CREMATED IN THE LAND WHERE HE HAD DIED.



THE SUCCESS STORY OF THE BIRLA FAMILY BEGAN WITH SETH SHIVNARAIN, BUT IT WAS THE VISION AND DETERMINATION OF HIS GRANDSON GHANSHYAM DAS THAT MADE THE NAME OF THE BIRLAS SYNONYMOUS WITH INDIAN INDUSTRY AND PHILANTHROPY.